

Unthinking Collaboration

American Nisei in Transwar Japan

BY A. CARLY BUXTON

about the book

Unthinking Collaboration uncovers the little-known history of second generation Japanese Americans (Nisei) who weathered the years of World War II on Japanese soil. Severed from the country of their birth when the attack on Pearl Harbor abruptly halted all passenger traffic on the Pacific, these Nisei faced the years of total war as members of the Japanese populace, ever the target of anti-American propaganda and suspicion. Whereas their white American counterparts were sequestered by Japanese authorities, placed on house arrest, or sent home on exchange ships during the war, American Nisei in Japan were left to contribute to the war effort alongside their Japanese neighbors as soldiers, cryptographers, interpreters, and in farming and manufacturing. When the dust of air raid bombings cleared, many such Nisei transitioned into roles in service of the Allied occupation and its goals of democratization and demilitarization. As censors, translators, interpreters, and administrative staff, they played integral roles in facilitating American-Japanese interaction, as well as in shaping policies and public opinion in the postwar era.

Weaving archival data with oral histories, personal narratives, material culture, and fiction, *Unthinking Collaboration* emphasizes the heterogeneity of Japanese immigrant experiences, and sheds light on broader issues of identity, race, and performance of individuals growing up in a bicultural or multicultural context.

pricing and retail

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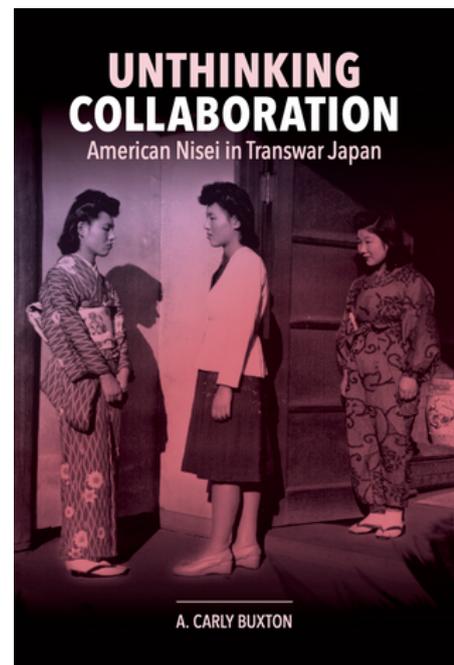
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available on [Amazon](#) and via the [UHP website](#)

praise and press

"Buxton's achievement lies in placing human lives dead center of an accounting of Nisei in Japan during the transwar period. Those lives include not only the infamous (e.g. 'Tokyo Rose' figure as persons and symbol), but also the everyday workers who, though born and sometimes raised in the United States, proudly called Japan 'home.' Loyalty lies at the core of these Nisei lives, guiding their actions and affiliations. What Buxton makes clear is that this loyalty was neither blood-based nor blind, but instead negotiated, situational, and complexly drawn."

—Christine R. Yano, *University of Hawai`i at Mānoa*



A. CARLY BUXTON, PHD

about the author

Carly Buxton is a writer, historian, and user research consultant whose work focuses on human behavior and decision making.

She earned her PhD in East Asian Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago, where she specialized in the history of Japan's colonial empire, assimilation policies, and propaganda.

Carly lives in Richmond, Virginia and can be found online at carlybuxton.com

meet carly

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University of Chicago
PhD, 2016

Harvard University
MA, 2009

University of Virginia
BA, 2007

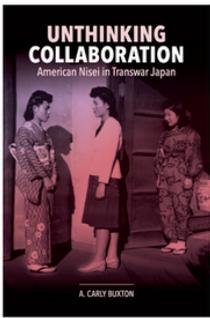
Fulbright Scholar
Japan, 2014-15

workshops and resources

UNTHINKING COLLABORATION

AMERICAN NISEI IN TRANSWAR JAPAN

LEARNING GUIDE
A. CARLY BUXTON



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THE MNEMONIC SITE OF FOOD

Chapter Four introduces the concept of the mnemonic site, material vehicles of meaning that shaped the physical landscape of everyday life in wartime Japan, stimulating Nisei—as well as the Japanese citizenry—to consider themselves as fused to other members of the populace through sites of shared meaning in the material environment. Select one of the following two recipes from wartime Japan to prepare and eat as you read Part Two of *Unthinking Collaboration*. As you learn about the mnemonic site of food in wartime Japan, you will be sharing in this ritual years later, participating in the food culture of wartime Japan—and savoring the ideals of patriotism (by eating the *hinomaru bento*) and economy (by dining on *suiton*) contained within the mnemonic sites of these dishes.

SUITON



1. Make the dumpling mixture: Sift 1/2 c flour into a medium bowl. Add 1/2 c water, whisking slowly. Cover with plastic wrap and set aside.
2. Prepare the soup ingredients: Slice 1/2 medium daikon radish and 2 stalks of gobo (burdock) into thin strips about 3 inches long. Dice 2 carrots. Separate a small bunch of Japanese mushrooms. Thinly slice 2 green onions, dividing whites from green tops. Cut a block of deep-fried tofu into 1-inch cubes.
3. Prepare the broth: Bring 5 cups of water to a boil in a large pot. Add 2-3 packets of dashi powder and stir.
4. Combine the soup: Add the daikon, gobo, and carrots. When the soup boils again, reduce to a simmer. Cover and simmer 10 minutes.
5. Add the mushrooms and white onion pieces. Stir.
6. Drop in the flour to make dumplings: Drop spoonful-sized scoops of the dumpling dough into the pot, one at a time, continuing to simmer the soup.
7. Once the dumplings have floated to the top, add the green onion tops and 1/2 soy sauce. Stir and simmer 5 minutes. Serve hot.

HINOMARU BENTO

topics

- collaboration
- brainwashing
- propaganda
- identity
- multiculturalism
- passing
- immigration history
- Nisei
- World War II
- assimilation
- loyalty
- treason



Carly is available both in person and virtually for interviews, guest appearances, guest blogs, workshops, classroom discussions, book club Q&A, and book signings.

To schedule, reach out at annecarlton@gmail.com

To download the *Unthinking Collaboration* learning guide for your class or reading circle, [click here](#). (7pgs, pdf)

contact

www.carlybuxton.com



annecarlton@gmail.com



[@professorbuxton](https://twitter.com/professorbuxton)



sample interview with the author

How did you choose to write about this topic?

As a graduate student, I studied Japan's empire-building and assimilation efforts--how dress, language, ritual, and design could influence behavior and identity. For my dissertation, I wanted to pursue some sort of project that grounded assimilation policies in data from psychology and neuroscience about *how* and *why* assimilation efforts "work," that is, how identity is indeed shaped by the ways that individuals dress, speak, act, work, and play. To be honest, after a few years of focusing on the nuances of Japanese dialect studies and language standardization, I was fed up with all of the translation work! I started looking into the history of Japanese Americans as a way to do more research in my native language, and I was quickly captivated by the story of Iva Toguri and her downfall as the legendary "Tokyo Rose." I knew that there must have been thousands of other Nisei living in Japan during the war years, and I wondered what became of them. That was the starting point for *Unthinking Collaboration*.

World War II ended more than 75 years ago. Why is this book timely today?

When I first started writing this book in earnest in 2018, I did not predict how front-and-center questions of race and authenticity would become, not just in academia, but in public discourse as well by the time the book was released. Race--and gender identity, too, for that matter--are not dealt with in isolated chapters of my book. They are central to its every argument, and I'm excited to hear from instructors, students, and other readers who approach these conversations about passing, performance, divided identity, and race and loyalty. And also along the same thread of timeliness, it was incredibly important that I did the research when I did, in the early- and mid-2010s. Many of the people I interviewed for this book have since passed away. I'm lucky to have been able to connect with the survivors of World War II, and to be one of the last few historians to capture their memories directly.

How has your career as a user researcher influenced your work as a historian?

One of the core principles of user research is that you can't ask the question you want to know the answer to. At least, you don't ask it directly, because people will say what they think you want to hear, and you'll have misleading data. In UX research, we learn ways to glean truths by asking *around* what we want to know. We want to know about motivations, emotions, or rationales, for example, but we get at these truths by probing instead for behavioral patterns, material surroundings, relationships, and categorization. But interestingly, this fundamental methodology hasn't really made its way into the work of history yet. Oral history, memoirs, and primary sources, too often, I think, are taken as fact, despite what we know about the faultiness of memory, and the propensity of subjects to posture and code into what they think their audience expects or wants to hear. I hope that *Unthinking Collaboration* will encourage other historians to incorporate methods from user research when they interrogate the archive.

Who's the book for?

My background is in Japanese history, but I wanted to write a book that would interest not just Japanologists and history buffs, but also the sort of thinkers who are looking for ways to break down the arbitrary and outmoded barriers that exist among academic disciplines. I'm not a psychologist or anthropologist by training, but I worked with scholars from those fields to produce this book, and I borrowed from their toolkits and their lexicon. With this book, I hope to attract readers from other disciplines, and to inspire conversations about the future of historical methodology and transdisciplinary, transregional studies.

What's next for you?

I work as an independent consultant in user experience research and market insights, and I also run a women's health startup called Nettle, which works to make virtual perinatal support more user-friendly. In terms of what's next for my writing, I have started working a novel about a Japanese American woman who travels to Japan just before the war, something that brings the history in *Unthinking Collaboration* to life through historical fiction.